

THE BANNER SERIES OF SELECTED SHORT STORIES



HE SAT in the shade of the lodge, smoking his pipe. His face was thin, keen and very expressive. The clear brown of his skin was pleasant to see, and his hair, wavy from long confinement in braids, was glossy as a blackbird's wing. Around his neck he wore a yellow kerchief—yellow was his "medicine" color—and he held a soiled white robe about his loins. He was about 50 years of age, but seemed less than 40.

He studied me quizzically as I communicated to him my wish to hear the story of his life, and laughingly muttered some jocose remark to his pretty young wife, who sat near him on a blanket, busy at some needlework. But the humorous look passed out of his face as he mused, the shadows lengthened on the hot, dry grass, and on the smooth slopes of the buttes the sun grew yellow.

After a long pause, he lifted his head and began to speak in a low and pleasant voice. He used no gestures, and his glance was like that of one who sees a small thing on a distant hill.

"I am well brought up," were his first words. "My father was chief medicine man of his tribe, and one who knew all the stories of his people. I was his best-beloved son, and he put me into the dances of the warriors when I was 3 years old. I carried one of his war-bonnet feathers in my hand, and was painted like the big warriors.

"When my father wished to give a horse to the Cut-throat or Burnt-thigh people who visited us and danced with us, he put into my hands the little stick which counted for a horse, and I walked across the circle by his side and handed the stick to our friend. Then my mother was proud of me, and I was glad to see her smile.

"My father made me the best bows, and my mother made pretty moccasins for me, covered with bright beads and the stained quills of the porcupine. I had ponies to ride, and a little tepee of my own in which to play I was chief.

"When I was a little older, I loved well to sit near my father and the old men and hear them tell stories of the days that were gone. My father's stories were to me the best of all, and the motions of his hands the most beautiful. I could sit all day to listen. Best of all I liked the stories of magic deeds.

"One day my father saw me holding my ear to the talk, and at night he said to me: 'My son, I see you are to be a medicine man. You are not to be a warrior. When you are older, I will teach you the secrets of my walk, and you shall follow in my path.'

"Thereafter I watched everything the medicine men did. I crept near, and listened to their words. I followed them with my eyes when they went aside to pray. Where magic was being done—there was I. At the dance I saw my father fling live squirrels from his empty hand. I saw him breathe smoke upon the body of a dead bird, and it awoke and ran to a wounded man and tore out the rotting flesh and cured him. I saw a mouse come to life in the same way. I saw the magic bladder move when no one touched it; and I saw a man buried and covered with a big stone too great for four men to lift, and I saw him come forth as if the stone were a blanket.

"I saw there were many ways to become a medicine man. One man went away on a high mountain, and there he stood and cried all the day and all the night, saying:

O Great Spirit!
I am a poor man.
I want to be wise.
I want to be big medicine man.
Help me, Great Spirit!
I want to be honored among my people.
Help me get blankets, horses.
Help me raise my children.
Help me live long.
Honored of my people!

"So he chanted many hours, without food or water, and it was cold also. At last he fell down in a sleep and dreamed. When he came home, he had medicine. A big bird had told him many secrets.

"Another went into a sweat-house to purify himself. He stayed all night inside, crying to the Great Spirit. He, too, dreamed; but he did not tell his dreams.

"A third man went into his tepee on a hill near the camp, and there, with nothing to eat or drink, he sat crying like the other two; and at last he slept, and in the night voices that were not of his mouth came in the tepee, and I, who listened unobserved, was afraid; and his women were afraid also. He soon became a great medicine man; and I went to my father, and I said:

"Make me a medicine man like Spotted Elk."

"He looked upon me, and said:

"My son, you are too young."

"Nevertheless, I insisted, and he promised that, when I became 16 years of age, he would help me to become like Spotted Elk. This pleased me.

"As I grew older, I put away in my memory all the stories my father knew of our people. I listened always when the old men talked. I watched the medicine men as they smoked to the Great Spirits of the world; I crept near, and heard them cry to the Great Spirit overhead and to the Dark One who lives below the earth. I listened all the time, and by listening I grew wise as an old man.

"I knew all the wonderful stories of the coyote and of the rattlesnake. I knew what the eagle said to his mate, and I knew the power of the great bear who sits erect like a man. I was a hunter, but I followed the game to learn its ways. In those days we were buffalo-eaters. We did not eat fish, nor fowl, nor rabbits, nor the meat of bear. Our women pounded wild cherries and made cakes of them, and of that we ate sometimes; but always we lived upon buffalo meat, and we were well and strong, not as we are now.

"I learned to make my own bows and also to make moccasins, though that was women's work, and I did not sew beads or paint porcupine quills. I wanted to know all things—to tan hides, to draw pictures—all things.

"By and by, time came when I was to become a medicine man. My father took me to Spotted Elk, the greatest of all medicine men, he that could make birds from lumps of meat and mice from acorns.

"To him my father said: 'My son wishes to be great medicine man. Because you are old and wise, I bring him to you. Help me to give him wisdom.'

"Then they took me to a tepee on a hill far from the camp, and there they sat down with me and sang the old, old songs of our tribe. They took food, and offered it to the Great Spirits who live in the six directions, beginning at the southeast. Then they smoked, always beginning at the southeast. This they taught me to do, and to

Rising Wolf--Ghost Dancer

By HAMLIN GARLAND
AUTHOR OF "MAIN-TRAVELED ROADS," "PRAIRIE FOLKS," ETC.

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"Oh, Help Us, Great Spirits,' We
Cried in Despair"

chant a prayer to each. Then they closed the tepee, and left me alone.

"All night I cried to the Great Spirits:

Hear me—O hear me!
You are close beside me.
You are here in the tepee.
Hear me, for I am poor and weak.
I wish to be great medicine man.
I need horses, blankets. I am a boy.
I wish to be great and rich.
Hear me—O hear me!

"All night, all next day, I cried. I grew hungry and cold by and by. I fell asleep; then came to me in my sleep a fox, and he opened his mouth and talked to me. He told me to put weasel skin full of medicine, and wear foxskin on my head, and that would make me big medicine. Then he went away, and I woke up.

"I was very hungry, and I opened the tepee and came out, and it was sunrise. My father was sleeping on the ground, and when I touched him, he woke quickly and said:

"My son, I am glad to see you. I heard voices that were not yours calling in the tepee, and I was afraid."

"All is well," I said. "Give me food."

"When I was fed, I took my bow and arrow and went forth to kill a weasel. When I was alone, I sat down and prayed to the Great Spirits of the six world directions, and smoked, beginning at the southeast, and a voice came in my ear which said, 'I will lead you.' Soon I came upon a large, sleeping weasel; he was white all over as snow, though it was yet fall. Him I killed and skinned, and stretched the pelt on a mat stick to make a pouch. Then I sought the medicine to go in it. What that was I will not tell, but at last it was filled; and then I slew a big red fox, and out of his fur I made my cap.

"Each night I went into my tepee alone to smoke and chant; and each night strange birds and animals came to me and talked and taught me much wisdom. Then came voices of my ancestors, and taught me how to cure the sick and how to charm the buffalo and the elk. Then I began to help my father to heal the sick people, and I became honored among my companions; and when I caught a maid on her way to the spring, she did not struggle; she was glad to talk with me, for I had a fine tepee and six horses and many blankets.

"I grew skilful. I could do many things white people never see. I could be buried deep in the ground, while a mighty stone, which six men alone could lift, was rolled upon me. Then in the darkness, when I cried to the Great Spirits, they came swiftly and put their hands to the stone, and threw it far away, and I rose and walked forth, and the people wondered. I cured many people by the healing of my hands, and by great magic like this: I had a dried mouse, and once when a man came to me stiff and cold with a hole in his side, I said, 'Put him before me.'

"When they did as I bid, I took the mouse and put it before the man who was dead, and I blew smoke upon the mouse and said: 'Great Spirits, help me to do this great magic.' Then the mouse came to life, and ran to the dead man and put his beak in the hole, and pulled out the dead flesh, and the wound closed up, and the man rose. These wonderful things I did, and I became rich. I had a fine, large tepee and many horses and skins and blankets. People said, 'See, there goes Rising Wolf. He is young, but he has many horses.' Therefore, I came to be called 'Many Horses'; but I had only one wife, Salling Hawk. I cared only for her."

"The chief's handsome face had long since become grave and rapt. Now it suddenly grew grim. His little wife moved uneasily in her seat by his side, and he looked at her with a strange glance. Between them had crept the shadow of Salling Hawk's death.

"One day while I sat with Salling Hawk in my tepee, a big, black cloud came flying out of the west like an eagle, and out of it the red fire stabbed and killed my wife and set my tepee on fire. My heart was like ice when I rose and saw my Salling Hawk dead. I seized my gun. I fired many times into the cloud. I screamed at it in rage. My eyes were hot. I was crazy. At last I went away, but my wife was dead, and my heart empty and like ashes. I did not eat for many days, and I cared no more for the Great Spirits. I prayed no more. I could not smoke, but I sat all night by the place where my Salling Hawk lay, and no man dared come to me. My heart was very angry toward everybody and all things. I could not see the end of my trail. All was black before me.

"My people at this time were living on their own lands. The big fight with 'Long Hair' had passed away, and we were living at peace once more; but the buffalo were passing away, and we feared and wondered.

"Then the white man came with his soldiers, and made a corral here in the hot, dry country, and drove us therein, and said, 'If you go outside, we will shoot you.' Then we became poor. We had then no buffalo at all. We were fed poor beef, and had to wear white men's clothes which did not fit. We could not go to hunt in the mountains, and the land was waterless and very hot in summer, and we froze in winter. Then there were many sick; but the white men sent a doctor, and he laughed at me, and ordered me not to go near the sick ones. This made my heart black and sorrowful, for the white man gave strange white powders that were very bitter in the mouth, and the people died thereafter.

"But many times when he had gone, I went in and made strong magic and cured the sick, and he thought it was his white powders. Nevertheless, more and more of my people came to believe in the white man, and so I grew very poor, and was forced to get rations like the rest. It was a black time for me.

"One night there came into our midst a Snake messenger with a big tale. 'Away in the west,' he said to us in sign talk, 'a wonderful man has come. He speaks all languages, and he is the friend of all red men. He is white, but not like other white men. He has been nailed to a tree by the whites. I saw the holes in his hands. He teaches a new dance, and that is to gather all the Indians together in council. He wants a few head men of all tribes to meet him where the big mountains are, in the place where the lake is surrounded by pictured rocks. There he will teach us how to make mighty magic and drive away the white man and bring back the buffalo.'

"All that he told us we pondered long, and I said: 'It is well, I will go to see this man, I will learn his dance.'

"All this was unknown to the agent, and at last, when the time came, four of us set forth at night on our long journey. On the third day two Snake chiefs and four Burnt-thighs joined us, then four Cut-throat people, and we all journeyed in peace. At last we came to the lake by the pictured rocks, where the three snow mountains are.

"There were many Indians there. The Big Belles were there from the north; and the Blackfeet, and the Magpies, and the Weavers, and the People-of-the-south-who-run-round-the-rocks, and the Black-people-of-the-mountains, all were there. We had council, and we talked in signs, and we all began to ask: 'Where is the Great Helper?' A day passed, and he did not come; but one night when we sat in council over his teachings, he suddenly stepped inside the circle. He was a dark man, but not so dark as we were. He had long hair on his chin, and long, brown head-hair, parted in the middle. I looked for the wounds on his wrists; I could not see any. He moved like a big chief, tall and swift. He could speak all tongues. He spoke Dakota, and many understood. I could understand the language of the Cut-throat people, and this is what he said:

"My people, before the white man came you were happy. You had many buffalo to eat and tall grass for your ponies. You could come and go like the wind. When it was cold, you could go into the valleys of the south, where the healing springs are; and when it grew warm, you could return to the mountains in the north. The white man came. He dug the bones of our mother, the earth. He tore her bosom with steel. He built big trails and put iron horses on them. He fought you and beat you, and put you in barren places where a horned toad would die. He said you must stay there; you must not hunt in the mountains.

"Then he breathed his poison upon the buffalo, and they disappeared. They vanished into the earth. One day they covered the hills; the next nothing but their bones remained. Would you remove the white man? Would you have the buffalo come back? Listen, and I will tell you how to make great magic. I will teach you a mystic dance, and then let everybody go home and

and at the dance I told the people what I had seen, and they were very glad. 'Teach us the dance,' they cried to me.

"Be patient," I said. 'Wait till all the other people get home. When the grass is green and the moon is round, then we will dance, and all the red people will dance at the same time; then will the white man surely fade away, and the buffalo come up out of the earth where he is hid and roam the sod once more.'

"Then they did as I bid, and when the moon was round as a shield, we beat the drum and called the people to dance.

"Then the white man became much excited. He called for more soldiers everywhere to stop the dance, so I heard afterward. But the people paid no attention, for was not the white man poor and weak by the magic of the dance?

"Then we built five fires, one to each world direction and one in the centre. We put on our best dress. We painted our faces and bodies in memory of our forefathers, who were mighty warriors and hunters. We carried bows and arrows and tomahawks and war clubs in memory of the days before the white man's weapons. Our best singers knelt around the drum, and the women sat near to help them sing. When the drum began to beat, our hearts were very glad. There were Magpies and Cut-throats among us, but we are all friends. We danced between the fires, and as we danced the drummers sang the mystic song:

Father, have pity on us.
We are crying for thirst—
All is gone!
We have nothing to eat.
Our Father, we are poor—
We are very poor.
The buffalo are gone;
They are all gone.
Take pity on us, O Father!
We are dancing as you wish,
Because you commanded us.
We dance hard—
We dance long.
Have pity!

"The agent came to see us dance, but we did not care. He was a good man, and we felt sorry for him, for he must also vanish with the other white people. He listened to our crying, and looked long; and his interpreter told him we prayed to the Great Spirits to destroy the white man and bring back the buffalo. Then he called me with his hand, and because he was a good man I went to him. He asked me what the dance meant, and I told him, and he said: 'It must stop.' 'I cannot stop it,' I said. 'The Great Spirits have said it. It must go on.'

"He smiled, and went away, and we danced. He came again on the third day, and always he laughed. He said: 'Go on. You are big fools. You will see, the buffalo will never come back, and the white man is too strong to be swept away. Dance till the fourth day; dance hard; but I shall watch you.'

"On the fourth night, while we danced, soldiers came riding down the hills, and their chiefs, in shining white hats, came to watch us. All night we prayed and danced. We prayed in our songs:

Great Spirit, help us.
You are close by in the dark.
Hear us and help us.
Take away the white man.
Send back the buffalo.
We are poor and weak.
We can do nothing alone.
Help us to be as we once were,
Happy hunters of buffalo.

"But the agent smiled, and the soldiers of the white chiefs sat not far off, their guns in their hands; and the moon passed by, and the east grew light, and we were very weary, and my heart was heavy. I looked to see the red come in the east. 'When the sun looks over the hills, then it will be,' I said to my friends. 'The white man will become as smoke. The wind will sweep him away.'

"As the sun came near, we all danced hard. My voice was almost gone. My feet were numb; my legs were weak; but my heart was big.

"Oh, help us, Great Spirits,' we cried in despair.

Father, the morning star,
Father, the morning star,
Look on us!
Look on us, for we have danced till dawn;
Look on us, for we have danced until daylight.

Take pity on us;
O Father, the morning star!
Show us the road—
Our eyes are dark.

Show us our dead ones.
We cry, and hold fast to you,
O morning star!
We hold out our hands to you and cry.
Help us, O Father!
We have sung till morning
The soundings song.

"But the sun came up; the soldiers fired a big gun, and the soldier chiefs laughed. Then the agent called to me:

"Your Great Spirit can do nothing. Your Messiah lied."

"Then I covered my head with my blanket, and ran far away, and I fell down on the top of the high hill. I lay there a long time, thinking of the white man's laugh. The wind whistled a sad song in the grass. My heart burned, and my breath came hard.

"Maybe he was right. Maybe the messenger was two-tongued and deceived us that the white man might laugh at us."

"All day I lay there with my head covered. I did not want to see the light of the sun. I heard the drum stop and the singing die away. Night came, and then on the hills I heard the wailing of my people. Their hearts were gone. Their bones were weary.

"When I rose, it was morning. I flung off my blanket, and looked down on the valley where the tepees of the white soldiers stood. I heard their drums and their music. I had made up my mind. The white man's trail was wide and dusty by reason of many feet passing thereon, but it was long. The trail of my people was ended.

"I said: 'I will follow the white man's trail. I will make him my friend, but I will not bend my neck to his burdens. I will be cunning as the coyote. I will ask him to help me understand his ways, and then I will prepare the way for my children. Maybe they will outrun the white man in his own shoes. Anyhow, there are but two ways. One leads to hunger and death; the other leads where the poor white man lives. Beyond is the happy hunting ground, where the white man cannot go.'

